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ABSTRACT

Students can benefit from collaboration long before they are ready for draft feedback. By analyzing writing assignments, anticipating and diagnosing student problems, and introducing necessary skills through appropriate exercises, students can be provided with cognitive and social supports that help them address the challenges of academic writing. Collaborative exercises supply students with practice in four skill areas: (1) generating and evaluating ideas; (2) summarizing and synthesizing reading material; (3) developing ideas; and (4) critical reading. In the first category, exercises frequently make use of a four-part strategy in which groups generate, select, refine, and evaluate potential ideas. To practice summarizing and synthesizing reading material with the collaborative approach, instructors can assign group summarizing activities using readings from the course, or group-written concluding paragraphs for assigned essays. Collaboration in developing ideas helps students to practice sustaining a line of inquiry, to show logical relationships between ideas, and to anticipate a reader's questions and objections. Finally, collaborative exercises in the critical reading of student texts include "norming," in which students read, respond to, and evaluate essays similar to their own work in progress. These exercises allow students to rehearse important elements of assigned writing projects, free of grade pressures. In addition, students can see how other students handle similar challenges and benefit from feedback on their own and others' efforts. (Twenty references are appended.) (MM)

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Capitalizing on Collaboration:

Using Groups to Help Students Write Better Drafts

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Capitalizing on Collaboration:

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Judging from published literature, conference reports, and conversations with writing instructors, putting students in groups to read and respond to each others' writing appears to be the most widely practiced form of collaboratively based instruction in composition. This form of collaborative learning, often referred to as the draft workshop method, offers many advantages: students learn to "hear" the written text; they develop a clearer sense of audience; they become part of a community of writers. However, the draft workshop method assumes a written text-- rough, perhaps, but still, a text. While experienced writers often revise extensively, inexperienced writers are notoriously recalcitrant (and often unskilled) revisors. Even with feedback, they may not make extensive changes in a text once it has been produced. Thus for them, peer review comes at a relatively late stage in the writing process. In fact, although advocates of the draft workshop method (for instance, Knoblauch and Brannon 102-150) justify its use on the basis of a "process" model of composition, its raison d'etre is a written product to which students respond. When collaborative learning is used primarily for peer review, it fails to capitalize on group energy and creativity during the crucial planning stages of writing that preceede or accompany drafting.

However, when used earlier in the writing process, collaborative learning activities can have a significant positive influence on the development of students' writing abilities. In a study integrating findings from dozens of research reports on writing instruction, George Hillocks compares the effectiveness of several classroom models and pre-writing techniques. Hillocks distinguishes between two forms of collaborative instruction: the "natural process" mode and the "environmental" mode

(141-146). The natural process mode is similar to the draft workshop method, in which students exchange drafts and give each other suggestions for revision. In the environmental mode, collaboration is used to help students develop specific composing skills or to rehearse cognitive processes relevant to work in progress. For example, in teaching extended definition, an instructor might identify relevant cognitive processess such as differentiating, formulating criteria, and analyzing borderline cases and then design exercises such as those described by Johannessen et al. (19-45) to familiarize students with these processes in preparation for writing definition essays.

Hillocks reports that both natural process and environmental instruction are superior to traditional, instructor-centered methods such as lecture. However, instruction in the environmental mode, designed to emphasize specific composing skills (as opposed to the emphasis on feedback and revision that characterizes the natural process mode) yielded the most substantial writing gains of any method (147-151). Hillocks also reports that "inquiry-focussed" pre-writing activities such as those described by Johannessen et al. are significantly more effective than either grammar instruction, the study of models of good writing, or the use of freewriting as preparation for writing (156-159).

Hillocks' findings substantiate the value of collaborative learning compared with traditional forms of instruction. His work also illuminates features that distinguish various forms of collaboration, and reveals some unexpected limitations of instruction that emphasizes peer review and revision. Several writers have suggested strategies for overcoming problems frequently encountered by instructors who use draft workshops (George 323-326; Grimm 92-94; Newkirk 310-311; Spear, in press; Strang 327-333). However, collaborative learning enthusiasts generally do not question the

value of the draft workshop method or looked beyond it for alternative ways to benefit from collaboration. Yet Hillocks' findings suggest that improving peer review may not significantly improve students' writing; instead, more dramatic gains in student writing may be obtainable by using collaborative methods to teach specific skills, processes and strategies as students initiate new writing projects.

Although collaborative learning is an effective instructional medium for introducing and rehearsing composing strategies and skills, only a few authors (for example, Gebhart 73-74; Hawkins, "Group Inquiry"; Hillocks, "Observing"; Johannessen et al. 19-45) offer guidance for secondary and college composition instructors who wish to design collaborative tasks to develop students' composing skills and improve the quality of their early drafts. As a psychologist specializing in the intellectual development of college students, I have long been interested in the developmental implications of collaborative learning and writing instruction. This interest led me to conduct my sabbatical research at Montana State University, where collaborative learning permeates the freshman writing program (Bean and Ramage, "Experimental Program"). The practices in use at MSU were developed by the writing staff following a grant in writing and thinking across the curriculum from the Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education; they are consistent with Hillocks' criteria for inquiry focussed environmental instruction. Moreover, they contribute significantly to our growing understanding of collaborative learning in modes other than the draft workshop. Instructors at MSU have found that using collaborative methods early in the writing process enables them to exploit this powerful intructional tool to let students rehearse cognitive processes relevant to their assignments and to clarify expectations of writing quality before the first draft is completed.

The collaborative activities described below are drawn from the current teaching repertoires of eight experienced instructors in the MSU writing program. I asked these instructors to tell me what their students were doing in class during the week in which the interview took place. I also attended one section of the freshman writing course for a full ten-week quarter to familiarize myself with the course as it is usually taught.

In general, instructors conduct collaborative activities in accordance with the characteristic sequence described by Bruffee (26-27) and Wiener (54). The instructor prepares in advance a well-defined problem or task* for students to complete in groups; often the students must do some individual preparation before the groups convene. The task results in some product--a list, a tree-diagram, a topic sentence, a collaboratively written paragraph, or the group's assessments of a set of essays. When the groups have completed their assigned task, recorders report their groups' results to the class. The instructor then conducts a synthesizing session in which she points out features of successful attempts, identifies recurring problems and provides preventive guidance, potentially avoiding hours of labor-intensive, often repetitive, individual feedback.

In the pages that follow, I describe collaborative exercises used by MSU instructors to provide students with practice in four skill areas: Generating ideas, summarizing and synthesizing reading material, developing ideas, and critical reading.

I. FINDING A PLACE TO START: GENERATING AND EVALUATING IDEAS

Helping students find appropriate problems to write about is often the most difficult challenge writing instructors face. Since essays in the MSU program begin with the formulation of a problem or question, the success of an essay often depends on the quality of the question posed. Instructors

find they must resort to a variety of strategies to help students recognize problems they are (often uniquely) qualified to write about or to select questions that interest them sufficiently to motivate sustained effort.

Exercises in this category frequently make use of a four-part strategy in which students generate, select, refine, and evaluate potential ideas. For these exercises, students first generate ideas in their groups or as a class. Each group then selects from the larger pool a few ideas to refine and share with the class during the synthesizing session. Here is a typical example of this general strategy: The instructor helps students generate and evaluate possible issues for argumentative essays by starting with a journal assignment in which they list subjects people argue about. In their groups, students share their lists, and each group then selects ten issues the members think would make good essays, aiming for originality. Lists are posted on the board for discussion. As the class compares the dozens of ideas sprawled across the boards, uniqueness and originality stand out; students discover that the "old standbys" (abortion, gun control, nuclear disarmament, capital punishment) are not likely to make good reading unless the writer has a unique perspective on the issue based on personal experience or extensive research. Students see for themselves that personally relevant, focussed questions attract interest. Thus a student interested in deaf education discovers others are interested in her views on mainstreaming deaf children; and a young woman from a farm in northern Montana is encouraged to explore issues surrounding a railroad company's decision not to serve the remote rural area where she lives.

Another essay commonly assigned in the MSU program asks students to explore the social, political, or ethical aspects of a dilemma or quandary they are unable currently to resolve. In addition to finding a suitable topic, students writing the dilemma essay must discover and articulate the

significant issues latent in the decisions they face, an unfamiliar and difficult process for many of them. The vicarious dilemmas frequently posed in films provide an opportunity for students to practice reformulating specific problems in terms of the abstract value conflicts or dilemmas they exemplify. For instance, in the film "The Iceman," the protaganists must decide how best to learn from a prehistoric man found frozen and revived. Because the film pits "scientific" against "humanistic" values, it evokes issues that students are likely to encounter as they are initiated into the academic community. Another film, "Local Hero," depicts the conflicts experienced by people in a coastal town in Scotland trying to deal with oil development. After viewing the film chosen by their instructor, the students discuss the film and attempt to identify the dilemmas represented. A recorder presents each group's interpretations to the class for discussion and feedback.

Another instructor presents students with specific problems for which they must identify implicit value conflicts. On a worksheet, she lists 15 questions (Should I "go blonde" for my boyfriend? Should we "scrap" the space shuttle? Should we put Grandpa in a nursing home or keep him home with us?). Each group tries to identify the major dilemma(s) behind each question (How much should I change myself for another person? How much do we value human life? What obligations do we owe to our parents?). Both the film and question exercises clarify relationships between problems and dilemmas and sensitize students to the larger significance of conflicts in their own lives, fostering depth and involvement in the resulting essays.

Students may also discover topics of interest for dilemma or argument essays when they find themselves embroiled in controversy. One instructor provides a list of potentially controversial statements ("Unmarried women are not as happy as married women." "Women should ask men out for dates.").

Students individually rate their agreement with each item; they then compare their ratings within groups, and questions with the most discrepant ratings are discussed. As students defend their positions, they often find they feel strongly enough about an issue to pursue it (or a related topic) in an essay. Other instructors use newspaper articles, brought in by students or provided by the instructor, to help students identify questions they might want to explore in writing. For instance, an instructor may require each group to identify five to ten "issue questions" suggested, even peripherally, by an article. By requiring five or more responses, the instructor encourages students to go beyond the obvious issues. This exercise leads into a focussing activity: Each group selects two questions and develops them into possible thesis statements for an argumentative essay; for this exercise, group members need not agree with the proposed thesis. The recorder writes the resulting sentences on the board; the instructor and other students then discuss problems, suggest modifications, and consider general characteristics of a good thesis statement.

With minor modifications, this "generate, select, refine and evaluate" sequence can be used for collaborative rehearsal of a variety of composing skills, particularly those relevant to expository writing. For instance, students can practice writing thesis statements, summaries, introductions and conclusions using this process. In the next section I will illustrate the use of this process to rehearse skills involved in summarizing and synthesizing.

II. RELATING READING TO WRITING: SUMMARY AND SYNTHESIS

Students must frequently write summaries of readings and lectures, and as Kiniry and Strenksi point out, many writing assignments that seem to call for high levels of reasoning are in fact requests for summaries of assigned reading or material from a particular class session (193). Summarizing and

synthesizing require students to formulate generalizations, sometimes from text or quantitative information, and sometimes from a single source or from numerous, possibly divergent sources.

The familiarity and apparent simplicity of summaries are deceptive. Inexperienced writers often have difficulty summarizing their own or other's ideas--constructing a representation of a text or formulating gists, in Flower, et al's terminology; 29-32). Synthesizing information from several sources further strains students' cognitive resources, requiring them to juggle several ideas at once while they seek an organizing principle for writing. Instructors in MSU's program have designed a variety of exercises to provide practice in using these important skills.

Early in the term, many instructors assign group summarizing exercises readings from the text for the course. Students receive a set of open-ended questions organized to reflect the structure of the assigned reading. The instructor assigns a set of questions to each group, and group members work out a response. Groups must generate their own examples to illustrate their answers; answers must be fully developed and written out by a recorder to turn in later. Recorders also read their groups' responses aloud for the synthesizing discussion. This exercise helps students understand important concepts from the text while they rehearse summary skills and practice relating text material to their own experience.

In academic writing, summarized information is usually incorporated into a larger text--a task hat inexperieced writers tend to accomplish clumsily at best. One instructor uses the introductory paragraph to give students practice in connecting ideas. She has them prepare for class by reading a short essay. (She uses one that mocks college students but any relevant, provocative item will work.) Each student drafts a summary of the article and then writes five questions triggered by the article that would

lead to further investigation or discussion. During class, group members read their summaries and questions to each other. Together, they select one question and develop a group summary that leads "gracefully" to that question. Recorders write their groups' paragraphs on the board and the instructor discusses each example wih the class. Each group then completes the essay by responding to the central question raised in the opening paragraph. The group essay enables the instructor to give personalized feedback to each group, which is especially important early in the term; the instructor also encourages groups to revise these early essays if their feedback indicates a need for further work.

Synthesizing information from multiple sources poses a more complex challenge than summarizing a single article. One instructor keeps a file of newspaper clippings on current issues (e.g., proposed University-wide budget cuts) for an activity to rehearse this skill. Each student reads the articles and writes a brief synthesizing paragraph. Students share their paragraphs in their groups to hear how others have managed the same information; the reading initiates a discussion about the subject of the articles and the group eventually writes a short practice essay on the topic.

Another instructor uses a collaborative writing task to provide practice in synthesizing, using material generated through freewriting. Students first freewrite in response to a question assigned by the instructor (e.g., "What do you think of journal writing?"). In order to prepare for the group writing task that follows, the instructor presents four hypothetical students' responses to a freewriting assignment on a different but similarly worded question, "What do you think about working in groups?" The responses are diverse and include one student who enjoys group work without reservations and another who hates it. The class is then asked to develop a

plausible opening sentence for a paragraph that answers the question "What is this group's view of working in groups?" In the discussion, students consider various strategies that could be used to integrate into a summarizing paragraph the diverse opinions expressed. The students' next task is to write a summarizing paragraph that answers the question "What is your group's view of the value of journal writing?" Now, however, their data comes from their own freewriting at the beginning of the exercise. Responses are compared and analyzed in the plenary session.

Another instructor has developed an exercise to help students see alternatives to summary-writing as a way to conlude an essay. Students often summarize when writing conclusions, even though most instructors prefer more imaginative strategies for ending an essay. In discussing characteristics of good conclusions, students readily agree that summaries are "boring." Nevertheless, when this instructor asks groups to formulate and share conclusions for a short essay that she has distributed, summaries are the most common response. In the plenary session, students are surprised to see how many groups wrote summaries, even when they were trying not to. Their surprise creates a "teachable moment" in which to discuss alternative strategies for concluding an essay.

These exercises allow students to rehearse important elements of assigned writing projects, free of grade pressures and supported by their peers. In both small group discussions and plenary sessions, they see how other students handle similar challenges and benefit from feedback on their own and others' efforts.

III. DEVELOPING IDEAS

Once students have chosen a topic, they face the challenge of developing their ideas. Effective development requires the writer to sustain a line of inquiry, show logical relationships between ideas, and

anticipate a reader's questions or objections. Collaborative rehearsal of these skills helps students understand how far they must push an idea to make it work for an audience. In this section I describe exercises for three kinds of development: details, causal chains, and opposing points of view.

Finding fresh, vivid details becomes almost a game for students when the topic is humorous or highly visual and when writing about it is a group project. One instructor assigns each group a choice of two sentences to develop in an in-class essay, using prompts such as, "The gym class was in an uproar" or "Two punk rockers got on the bus." Another tactic is to have each group describe a hypothetical automobile accident. Each student in the group then assumes a different role with respect to the event (driver, witness, passenger, victim) and writes a short report of the accident for a particular audience (police officer, judge, parents of the driver or victim). Group members read their reports to each other and select one to share with the class. As they listen, students experience the vivid impressions conveyed by well-chosen details, in clear contrast to the groans and unsympathetic laughter evoked by cliches.

An instructor with a flair for dramatic (and humorous) reading uses her skill to illustrate the effects of details on readers. She has half of her groups describe a character, while the remaining groups describe a scene. Groups then swap papers and write scenes for the characters they receive, or characters to "people" the scene with which they are presented. The instructor reads these hybrid descriptions to the class, evoking responses from groans to laughter to sadness, and prompting discussion of how the language a writer selects shapes the readers' response. The activity offers at least three benefits: writing collaboratively is an enjoyable way for groups to learn to function as a unit; students hear each others' writing;

and the exchange encourages interaction between groups, fostering a sense of community in the class.

Developing an essay which describes a problem and proposes a solution requires the writer to analyze the causes of the problem and anticipate possible consequences of proposed solutions. One instructor has students work in groups to rehearse reasoning in causal chains in preparation for writing a problem-solution essay. She describes a situation, such as college graduates' not being employed in their fields of study, and asks groups to identify as many possible causes as they can. She also presents them with a "what if" question ("What if the federal government passed a law that no one could require degrees for a job?") and asks them to generate possible consequences. In each case, the instructor encourages the groups to "try to come up with something no other group will think of." The class discusses responses to each question to clarify the characteristics of sound causal reasoning.

Much academic writing requires the writer to state a thesis and defend it with logic and evidence. An important rhetorical strategy in developing an argument is to anticipate and refute objections to one's thesis. However, students who have identified an issue they feel strongly about often have difficulty identifying legitimate counterarguments. Collaborative exercises lend themselves well to solving this problem: students can help each other anticipate opposition to each others' ideas. Peter Elbow's Believing/Doubting game (147-191) provides a prototype for many such exercises. For example, an instructor might have each student write his thesis statement at the top of a sheet of paper and pass it around to each person in the group, who writes one "belief" and one "doubt" for the claim, then folds the paper to conceal what has already been written and passes it to the next person until everyone in the group has contributed.

Alternatively, an instructor might allow five or six minutes for each student to cull all the "beliefs" and "doubts" her group can generate about her thesis statement; the writer is responsible for recording all suggestions. If the writer has already generated her own list, she can compare her ideas to those suggested by the group to identify possible blind spots. Although these strategies are designed to support argumentation essays, they can easily be adapted to generate ideas and supportive details for other rhetorical modes.

Once a writer has identified an objection she might encounter, she must find a way to refute it. Many inexperienced writers deny or negate a point ("It's not true that...") without actually refuting it by developing the reasons behind their denial ("Your argument fails to take into account the fact that...."). To familiarize students with opposition and refutation, one instructor gives groups a thesis or claim to work with, e.g., "Freshman Composition should be Pass/Fail." Each group generates reasons in opposition to the claim. Groups then exchange lists and refute the opposing points offered, i.e., respond in support of the claim. For instance, an argument against the claim might be that without grades, a student won't know how much she is learning. Denial might consist of stating categorically that "of course" she <u>will</u> know since she is the learner. In contrast, refutation would require the writer to offer a counterargument, for example, that grades do not necessarily indicate how much one is learning, since they can be based on inadequate measurement, an unfair grading system, or chance factors such as one's mood on the day of a test. In the discussion, students further rehearse the cognitive challenges of analyzing and countering arguments.

Sympathetic presentation and systematic refutation of views that differ from one's own require intellectual agility not common among college

freshmen. Exercises such as these do not only yield material for current writing assignments; they encourage dialectical reasoning, helping students learn to anticipate objections and respond to them thoughtfully.

IV. LEARNING TO EVALUATE WRITING: CRITICAL READING OF STUDENT TEXTS

The activities described above focus on specific elements of an essay, but students must eventually produce completed essays and respond to them in the draft workshop. Although the draft workshop draws on skills and processes rehearsed in earlier exercises, these skills most now be integrated; students must shift from primarily generating and refining parts to evaluating and responding to the whole. Familiar skills often deteriorate when used in novel ways, and especially when the situation involves social risks such as those associated with "criticizing" the work of one's peers. For these reasons, rehearsal of peer review is as important as rehearsal of other processes associated with composing and revising written text.

Students can obtain significant, relevant, and comparatively risk-free practice reviewing drafts through a procedure referred to as "norming." In a norming session, students read, respond to, and evaluate essays similar to their own work in progress, drawn from the work of previous students. The process is similar to practices used in holistic scoring sessions and, similarly, draws students into an interpretivive community in the manner described by White (96-99).

As practiced at MSU, norming exercises are based on a collection of essays written by students in previous classes, organized into a Student Essay Book. Prior to the norming session for each assignment, students read four to six essays from the appropriate section of the Student Essay Book, and rate each one using a six-point scale. Then in their groups, they discuss reasons for their ratings and attempt to agree on a group rating for

each essay in the assigned set. The instructor records the groups' ratings on a grid on the board. When ratings differ by two points or more, the instructor asks each group to justify its assessment. After the class has agreed on reasonable scores for the sample essays, the instructor reports the scores suggested by writing faculty. When the scores are similar, the session reaches happy closure; when the scores are different, the instructor initiates more discussion.

The purpose of norming is not simply to arrive at consensus about scores, but to generate criteria for evaluating essays of a particular type. This process is both collaborative and inductive: as the class discusses each of the sample essays, the instructor shapes their comments into a set of criteria that will be used to guide as well as to evaluate their writing. Students are expected to refer to the criteria developed by the class as they write their drafts. The same criteria are then used to structure the peer review session and to score the students' finished essays.

The instructor plays a crucial role in this process. As she draws out reasons for discrepant ratings, she must help students recognize and reflect upon their implicit assumptions about writing quality. Without putting words into her students' mouths, she must forge a consensus about evaluation criteria. While encouraging their own thinking, she must do justice to standards of quality accepted in the larger academic community. Through this inductive, collaborative process, the instructor nurtures the writing community in her classroom while helping students become responsible readers and writers of academic writing.

Instructors in the program vary their norming strategies to avoid monotony, since norming sessions are held for each of the four to six essays assigned in a quarter. In one variation, the instructor asks students to read the essays, select the best and least liked essay from the set, and

write out reasons for their decisions before they meet for group work. In groups, the students come to consensus about which is the "best" essay, giving reasons and identifying examples from the essay in support of their choice. In another variation, each group identifies strengths and weaknesses of one essay. This insures that each group has analyzed at least one essay in depth prior to class discussion of the set, and confers "resident expert" status on members of each group in matters pertaining to "their" essay.

Norming may frustrate some students because it dramatizes the absence of absolute standards for grading, contradicting their assumptions about the instructors' responsibility to evaluate their work on objective grounds (Perry 86-92). Students, especially freshmen, may not understand that standards for evaluating writing reflect the values and purposes of different writing communities; they are likely to be disturbed when two readers disagree on the quality of a single essay--especially if both readers are supposedly "experts." An exercise that asks students to view writing samples from two perspectives serves to introduce them to this epistemological reality. For this exercise, students read and evaluate short passages paired to contrast features the instructor wants them to consider. The instructor pairs a dull but grammatically correct passage with one that is rich in both details and errors; a second pair contrasts complex and simple writing styles; and a third pair contrasts two job application letters, one that makes its case through cliches and generalizations and one that uses personal experiences. (The passages are drawn from Schwarz, 56-60.) In their groups, students seek consensus about a) which they think is the best passage in each pair and b) which they think an English teacher would think best. Recorders report the groups' choices and supporting reasons to initiate the discussion. The instructor then

informs students how English faculty and faculty across the curriulum have rated the essays and shows, much to the students' dismay, how much internal disagreement there is in each group. Through this discussion, the instructor attempts to help students understand the complex, pluralistic nature of writing evaluation, recognizing that some will remain mystified by this condition.

Responding to an entire essay or set of essays can be an overwhelming task for many students, especially when peer review is first introduced. Paired essays are useful for helping students focus on a single important feature of the writing they are to do. For example, one instructor pairs arguments that take the same position on an issue, but use different rhetorical strategies; students must choose the one most persuasive and, as always, explain the reasons for their selections. Alternatively, by analyzing the complex task of reviewing an essay into manageable chunks, the instructor can prepare students to handle this new challenge. For example, one instructor poses a series of questions about an essay read by the whole class. He'll raise a question, such as, "Does the central question follow logically from the opening paragraph development?" Students debate the question in their groups for several minutes and then report their decision for class discusion. Once that question is resolved, the instructor introduces another question and continues until key features of the essay have been addressed. This approach mirrors the analytical process used to help students plan and develop their own essays. It also externalizes processes used by experienced readers as they evaluate their own and others' texts. Both approaches help students learn to focus their reading.

Discussion in these activities becomes surprisingly heated. Students who might be reluctant to criticize or even describe the work of a physically present peer have much to say about the writing of students who

have gone before them. Their work benefits from the opportunity to articulate, without fear of antagonizing the writer, their responses to a finished text and to witness their peers' responses to other students' writing. When students engage in evaluative discussions of completed essays prior to initiating their own, they begin their writing with enriched representations of possible approaches to their task and a clear idea of the criteria that will be used to evaluate their writing. They also learn to talk intelligently about written products. Finally, when students participate in the process of critical reading and discussion, they accumulate concrete evidence that will eventually culminate in the realization that complexity, uncertainty, and divergent opinion are facts of academic life.

CONCLUSION

These examples demonstrate some of the ways in which students can benefit from collaboration long before they are ready for draft feedback. By analyzing writing assignments, anticipating and diagnosing student problems, and introducing necessary skills through collaborative practice exercises, the instructor provides students with cognitive and social supports that help them address the novel challenges of academic writing. Exercises such as those described here also provide students with dozens of examples illustrating how particular writing problems might be approached, and involve them in the processes of generating, selecting, refining and evaluating that experienced writers use to shape their work.

Like any pedagogical strategy, the collaborative model described here is not without its challenges and pitfalls. Good task design depends on accurate analysis of the cognitive challenges of writing assignments and on the instructor's ability to anticipate students' response to a particular

strategy. Problems posed for collaborative work must relate clearly to the goals of the course and must be engaging enough to sustain students' attention. Tasks must fit the time available, and the instructor must find graceful ways to handle different completion rates. Instructions must be presented clearly and authoritatively so that activities can proceed with a minimum of confusion. Groups must be accountable for some specifiable result to maintain a strong orientation to task. Plenary sessions must encourage dialogue and synthesis within the class while establishing connections with the larger academic community. Specific suggestions for managing collaborative classooms can be gleaned from Wiener (54-60); in addition, experience and frequent exchanges of ideas with like-minded instructors are valuable assets to anyone who uses collaborative methods.

When skillfully executed, the approach to composition instruction described here circumvents problems of peer review such as those described by George, Spear, Strang and others. To begin with, groups can function effectively because their task is manageable and well defined, and members are motivated to participate because their group is accountable to the entire class. The strategies described here also circumvent students' reluctance to criticize each others' work. They put peers in the supportive roles they seem naturally to prefer, even while the exercises challenge them to help each other stretch their thinking, see ideas from a variety of perspectives, and come to terms with the intellectual demands of writing. Finally, students rehearse peer review and participate in developing evaluation criteria during norming sessions. These experiences sharpen their sense of what is expected as they write and review drafts.

Peer review models are plagued by problems that arise from students' perception of their role as surrogate teachers functioning in the traditional evaluative role (Spear, in press) and from their reluctance or

inability to make major revisons once a draft has been written (Flower et al 16-18; Knoblauch and Brannon 130). In contrast, the model of collaborative rehearsal described here minimizes the evaluative focus that characterizes draft review, and capitalizes on collaboration to help students improve their writing before it crystallizes into relatively intractable text.

Note

1. Many of the exercises described here are based on assignments suggested in the text used at MSU (Bean and Ramage's Form and Surprise in Composition: Writing and Thinking Across the Curriculum). However, exercises of the type described here can readily be developed from other sources.

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